

## **Council on Aging/Senior Center Fiscal Year 2002**

FY 02 was a year of both struggle and growth for our Senior Center. Most of the parking areas adjacent to the Bangs Center were torn up and we did our best to maintain normalcy while operating in the middle of the new parking garage construction site. Classes at Bangs were smaller than usual and some moved to other locations out of frustration. Our bus trips departure site was moved to the Newmarket Center until that became more occupied by businesses. We were lucky that when one door closed another opened: Big Y welcomed us to park there during bus trips as long as we grouped cars as close to the back of China Dynasty as possible and away from CVS. This convenient and free parking location will continue permanently as our bus trip departure site.

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> brought us great sadness and new challenges. A number of our participants spent tearful hours with us, and also more people stayed away. Our long-planned bus trip to New York City was cancelled and our overseas trip to Spain only attracted one applicant from Amherst – everyone else backed out fearfully. For several months, all our trips were kept close to home. In order to help folks manage their fears, anger and grief, we offered a discussion group called “Troubled Times” under the leadership of psychotherapist Claire Ludlow. This group continues to meet and has evolved now into two other classes.

On the more positive side, our new computer room/gallery opened after years of planning, with five new and three reconditioned computers. We are so grateful to Information Systems, Nancy Maglione, Alan Root, Carl Brose and David Wheeler for all of their planning help and gifts. Seniors love having access to the internet, up-to-date computers and color printers. Several free classes are held each semester and there are waiting lists for all. The Senior Center continues to look for more volunteer instructors.

During the past fiscal year, the Jean Elder Congregate House (JEH) and the Joan Tobin Congregate Apartments have seen many changes brought on by a reduced number of residents over the past five years. Donna Crabtree, Executive Director of Amherst Housing Authority, and Jonathan Hite, Executive Director of the Northampton Housing Authority, made the decision to rent apartments to non-profit human service agencies that had contracts with the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) in Amherst and a statewide Head Injury Program (SHIP), in Northampton. Presently, three of the six apartments (a total of 17 beds) at JEH, and one of the two apartments at Tobin (with a total of 4 beds) are being rented by DMR and SHIP agencies. The impact on the Amherst Senior Center was tremendous. The contract that the Senior Center has with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs for the two part-time congregate coordinator positions is a unit contract, which means that when the number of beds on line for congregate housing decreases, the contract decreases proportionally. As a direct result of this decrease, one of the congregate coordinator positions has been eliminated, and the second one had the hours cut.

As we enter FY 03, with five out of nine new Council on Aging members, budgetary challenges await. Our focus will be to continue work on making our Senior Center an even better “Wellness Center” and an even more welcoming place for our diverse population with its many challenges.

